

“A NEGRO WHO COULD READ AND WRITE THE ARABIC
LANGUAGE”:
AFRICAN MUSLIM SLAVES AS INTERMEDIARIES IN NORTH
AMERICAN PLANTATIONS AND AFRICAN COLONIES

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the stories told about an elite group of Muslim slaves in antebellum America who were trained as rulers and Islamic scholars in Africa. It asks what opportunities their prominent backgrounds and literacy in Arabic afforded them in American slave society. It addresses how white society responded to the achievements of this particular group of slaves. Particularly, this thesis looks into the role that such distinguished Muslims slaves played in the designs of the American Colonization Society.

This thesis is based primarily upon nineteenth century letters and newspaper and journal articles written about seven Muslim slaves. Of the estimated 30,000 Muslim slaves who arrived in North America between 1711 and 1870, only seven attracted enough attention from contemporary white-society and modern-day historians to present fuller understandings of their lives. These letters and articles provide biographical information about the slaves. They are also key to understanding how white masters, businessmen, and politicians navigated around issues of slavery, race, and personal interests when dealing with literate Muslim slaves. I rely heavily on the first thirteen volumes of *The African Repository* to highlight how colonization supporters envisioned elite Muslim slaves in their commercial and Christianizing schemes for Africa.

Historians analyzing Muslim slaves in antebellum America have revealed that the presence of such slaves stratified slave society by creating the category of the superior “Moor” over the inferior “negro.” After analyzing the development of this category in American plantations, I focus on the American Colonization Society to highlight similar developments in its plans. I conclude that just as masters gave elite Muslim slaves authority over the rest of slaves in plantations, so too, the ACS envisioned them as intermediaries over the rest of Africa, as beacons of light to spread commerce and Christianity through

their supposed influence over Arabic-speaking regions and non-Muslim communities.

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Section I	5
Section II.....	14
Section III	22
Conclusion	36
Bibliography	38
Biographical Statement.....	41

“A Negro Who Could Read and Write the Arabic Language”:

African Muslim Slaves as Intermediaries in North American Plantations and African Colonies

“It may not be a bad policy, on the part of the government, to send home the very few Moors in our country, and thus show our love of justice to the trans-Mediterranean countries.”¹ This astonishing statement was reportedly made in 1828 by a newspaper editor from Natchez at a time when a number of politicians, businessmen, and journalists were expending significant energy and effort in sending one particular “Moor” back home. Who were these “Moors”? Even though the term “Moor” in the early nineteenth century often indicated a Muslim from Northern Africa, the “Moor” in this statement did not refer to the white Arabs of Northern Africa. Rather, the term was used to describe a sub-Saharan population of black West Africans who were “Moors” only in so far as they were Muslim. Considering the particular slave who inspired this statement, an educated son of a tribal chief, the term “Moor” as employed by Americans in the nineteenth century signified a very specific group of Muslims: the educated and ruling class of Muslim Africans who found themselves enslaved in America.

This thesis focuses on the stories told about educated Muslim slaves—the “Moors” of the previous paragraph—to better understand their experiences in North America. I will analyze the role that their elite background played in shaping their experiences as slaves and how white planters, businessmen, and politicians alike discussed the presence of a particular class of African elites and professionals among American slaves. In doing so, I will highlight the commonalities in the way both masters and members of the American Colonization Society incorporated the elite backgrounds of certain Muslim slaves in the plans of their organizations – be that organization a plantation or a colony in Africa.

¹ Editorial, *Southern Galaxy*, October 30, 1828.

My work adds to a growing interest among historians of the African diaspora in highlighting the Muslim presence in America. The three historians I am particularly engaging in this work are Allan Austin, Michael Gomez, and Sylviane Diouf. They have made significant strides in uncovering the history of African Muslims in North America. In their analysis of the slave trade, both Austin and Gomez have revealed that a significant portion of African-born slaves coming into America were Muslim. Allan Austin, a historian of antebellum America, summarizes the records on Africans arriving from regions with Islamic influence, like Senegambia, Sierra Leone, and the area between Liberia and Nigeria. He posits that 10 percent of West Africans arriving in North America from 1711 to 1808 were Muslim.² In his estimate, Austin takes into account the increased preference for Gambian slaves in the post-colonial era, and suggests that in total about 30,000 Muslim slaves arrived in North America between 1711 and 1870.³ This number is similar to that provided by Michael Gomez in his analysis of the African diaspora. Gomez, a historian of both Africa and the African diaspora, writes that Muslims came to America “by the thousands, if not tens of thousands.”⁴ Both Austin and Gomez help us understand that the presence of Muslim slaves in North America was a significant and significantly under-recognized phenomenon.

Prior to the work of these three historians, publication about Muslim slaves was limited to examination of the lives of individual Muslims. A good example of this earlier writing is Douglas Grant’s biography of Job ben Solomon, *The Fortunate Slave* (1968). In his biography of ben Solomon, Grant employed documents from the Royal African Company to highlight the African trades that made Job an asset to the company. However, *The Fortunate Slave* is limited to Job and does not delve into a fuller discussion of the presence of Muslims in America. Things changed in 1984 when Allan Austin published his sourcebook titled *African Muslims in*

2 Allan D. Austin, *African Muslims in Antebellum America: A Sourcebook* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1984), 355.

3 Ibid.

4 Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 66.

Antebellum America. Austin's collection of newspaper extracts, letters, and journal articles featuring fifteen Muslim slaves provided a more coherent picture of the experiences of Muslim slaves in America. Seven of the fifteen slaves appearing in the compendium of documents attracted attention in the U.S. In piecing together their stories, Austin's sourcebook laid down the groundwork for comparisons and analysis of common themes across narratives about Muslim slaves.

Gomez and Diouf extended Austin's analysis by further exploring these themes. A historian of West Africa, Michael Gomez shifted his attention to Muslims in North America in his books *Exchanging Our Country Marks* (1998) and *Black Crescent* (2005). His publications explore the influence of Muslim slaves on race relations and culture in North America. His greatest contribution to the literature on Muslim American slaves in what became the United States is the connection between Muslim slaves and slave hierarchy. Gomez describes several instances of Muslim privilege in which "Moors" acceded to higher positions, often with authority over other slaves with whom they interacted on American plantations. He demonstrates that the advancement of Muslim slaves amplified stratification within the enslaved population by creating the privileged category of the "Moor".⁵

Like Gomez, historian Sylviane Diouf illuminates the influence of Muslim slaves on race relations and culture in America. Broad in scope and meticulous in detail, *Servants of Allah* (1998) describes similarities in the experiences of Muslim slaves across the Americas and the Caribbean from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Diouf outlines the ways in which Muslim slaves sought to preserve their identity and distinctive practices as they acclimated to the American environment. Crucial to Diouf's project is her description of the pervasiveness of literacy among Muslim slaves. Diouf enhances the literature on Muslim slaves by demonstrating the role that literacy played in slaves' lives and demonstrating literacy as a factor that distinguished Muslims from other slaves.

⁵ Ibid., 82.

My thesis draws upon the work of both Gomez and Diouf to examine the variety of opportunities that the elite background of certain North American Muslim slaves afforded them. Of the 30,000 Muslim slaves arriving in North America from Africa, only seven received enough attention by contemporary white society and modern-day historians to enable me to piece together fuller understandings of their lives. All seven of these slaves came from an educated class of Africans. They had devoted years of study to Islamic teachings and literary classics. Chance encounters with the right person at the right time fortuitously brought these slaves' existence in the historical record. Building on Gomez's analysis of stratification within slave society, this work shows that masters often placed elite Muslims in administrative positions. I rely upon Diouf's analysis of literacy among Muslim slaves to argue that it was the higher-education of these seven, together with the elite status that education enabled, that provided them access to higher-ranking positions in North America. Like Gomez and Diouf, I will argue that elite Muslims enjoyed an intermediary role over the rest of their masters' slaves due to their prominent scholarly backgrounds. I will push beyond Gomez and Diouf's work, however, by analyzing how the intermediary role of some Muslim slaves figured into the designs of the American Colonization Society. While Diouf briefly mentions colonization schemes as a means by which American slaves might go back to Africa, Gomez does not mention colonization at all. My focus on the American Colonization Society will underscore the position that elite Muslim slaves occupied in the organizations of white society by showing how that position fit into schemes beyond the plantation. I argue that their scholarly training, and its recognition by their owners, placed them above the rest of the slaves. It would later also place them—in the minds of the advocates of the American Colonization Society—above the rest of the population in Africa as facilitators of trade and Christian missions around U.S colonies in Africa.

To demonstrate that elite Muslim slaves shared similar experiences I will carefully examine the biographies of seven Muslim slaves in North America. These biographies were often produced in the form of letters exchanged between white correspondents who happened to come

across educated Muslim slaves by chance. White interlocutors were so struck by the achievements of Muslim slaves that they publicized their stories in journals affiliated with various associations and in letters they penned to influential friends. The primary materials I examine here are the same that Austin, Gomez, and Diouf examine in their works. In the discussion of Abdul Rahahman, I take a look at newspaper articles to understand the concerns Abdul Rahahman aroused in white society. Austin's sourcebook first drew my attention to these newspaper extracts. In my thesis I also rely heavily upon the *African Repository*, a quarterly printed by the American Colonization Society. While Austin reprinted some articles from this publication, there are many additional articles in the first thirteen volumes of the *African Repository* that I examine to make sense of the context in which the articles mentioning Muslim slaves appeared. The articles from the *African Repository* are crucial to laying out my argument about the intermediary role that certain Americans envisioned for Muslim slaves in Africa.

I

The spread of Islamic schooling in West Africa meant that a portion of the Muslim slaves arriving in North America from those areas could read and write. The rise and consolidation of Islam in West Africa since its introduction in the eighth century had fostered a variety of learning institutions in urban and rural areas.⁶ Not only was literacy widely valuable, but it was also available to people in various ethnicities, genders, and social strata.⁷ Both first-hand travel accounts and anecdotes from Muslim slaves in America describe the diffusion of educational institutions and opportunities in the Muslim regions of West Africa by the nineteenth century. Traveling through the Gambia in the 1770s, Mungo Park ascribed the spread of Islam in the area not to the sword but to a "more efficacious" means: the establishment of schools where both Muslim and non-Muslim children were taught the Koran.⁸ He encountered many of these small

6 Nehemia Levtzion and Randall Pouwels, *The History of Islam in Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000), 420.

7 Ibid.

8 Mungo Park, *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa: Performed under the Direction and Patronage of the African Association in the Years 1796, 1796, and 1797* 2nd ed. (London: W. Bulmer, 1799), 60.

schools as he forged farther into the interior, even within predominantly non-Muslim lands. Almost half a century later, a Muslim slave in the American South by the name of Lamén Kebe would reinforce Park's observation about the widespread availability of schooling in West Africa. His remarks were presented by Theodore Dwight, a traveler, magazine editor, and American Ethnological Society member, at the American Lyceum in 1835 to promote educational reforms. Kebe had related to Dwight that in "Nigritia," where he himself had taught as a schoolmaster for years, "all the children have the means of instruction in basic reading and writing that was provided gratuitously from government funds."⁹ Instruction of this sort entailed teaching pupils how to sound out the Arabic letters and copy the words in the Quran. At the very beginning of these studies, students probably did not know the meaning of the words they were reading, but they were learning how to read the Arabic and copy the shapes they saw on the page of their manuscripts. Those who took advantage of the schooling system in Muslim West Africa became familiar with the Arabic alphabet and developed literacy skills from there.

The Muslim slaves discussed here far surpassed this rudimentary level in their literacy. Of the seven slaves who appear most frequently in the historical record, five were scholars or scholars-in-training and at least two were princes of Islamic kingdoms. As Abdul Rahahman shared with his biographer, education was valued in his hometown of Timbuktu, but particularly so for the higher classes.¹⁰ He, himself, was the son of a ruling family. A center of erudition that rose to influence in the thirteenth century, Timbuktu served as home to many scholars arriving from various parts of Africa to advance their Islamic education.¹¹ In such a center of learning, status and respectability derived from one's command of literacy and Islamic theology. While the strata of wealthy merchant families and notable scholars often intersected, craftsmen and tradesmen, too, aspired to some degree of respectability by educating at least one son.¹² In

9 Theodore Dwight, "On the Sereculeh Nation, in Nigritia," *American Annals of Education and Instruction* 5 (1835): 453.

10 Cyrus Griffin, "Prince of Footah Jullo," *Southern Galaxy*, July 5, 1828.

11 Levtzion and Pouwels, 4-8.

12 Ibid., 81-82.

Timbuktu students were taught not just reading and writing, but mathematics, astronomy, and neighboring languages as well.¹³ Most importantly, though, as Dwight related from his conversations with Kebe who had studied in a similar learning center, students of “advanced studies” pored over commentaries and other theological works to better understand the Quran.¹⁴ These commentaries are particularly of note here because they suggest a deeper familiarity with Arabic. Advanced students on their path to becoming scholars or ruling a kingdom would no longer be sounding out words and copying shapes they did not understand, but actively engaging with the Arabic language in all its written and spoken intricacies. It was this familiarity with Arabic that attracted the attention of prominent white members of U.S. society like James Oglethorpe, Francis Scott Key, and Henry Clay. And it was the attention of such prominent American elites, in turn, that secured the place of these Muslim slaves in the American historical record. These particular Muslim slaves came from a very specific class of privileged people who had access to advanced education in prominent centers of erudition and who had the good fortune to be noticed by key members of white society.

Despite the specific nature of the events that led to each slave’s widespread recognition, however, there is enough evidence to suggest that the experiences of these particular Muslim slaves were more widely shared by other African Muslims enslaved in North America. A slave in Georgia known as London produced several manuscripts. These revealed that London was transliterating the Gospel and other hymns into the Arabic alphabet.¹⁵ Another Georgian slave named Charno exhibited literacy in Arabic when he wrote the first chapter of the Quran in Arabic for the amusement of novelist William Caruthers. Caruthers concluded after this incident that Charno was “no common character.”¹⁶ Charno, in fact, is a term that meant “marabout” in Pulaar (marabouts were traveling scholars who offered literacy and religious services to tribal chiefs and

13 *Southern Galaxy*, July 5, 1828.

14 Theodore Dwight, “Art. V. --Condition and Character of Negroes in Africa,” *The Methodist Quarterly Review* 24 (January, 1864): 78.

15 William Brown Hodgson, *The Gospels, Written in the Negro Patois of English, with Arabic Characters, by a Mandingo Slave in Georgia* (1857), 5.

16 William Alexander Caruthers, *The Kentuckian in New York: Or, The Adventures of Three Southerners* (1834), 1:147.

served as instructors in schools).¹⁷ The ability of these Muslim slaves in North America to compose in Arabic, not just copy words, indicates that many beyond the best-known cases had advanced in education before their enslavement. Their fleeting presence in the record further suggests that there were many literate Muslim slaves who went unnoticed by whites. While acknowledging that there were thousands of poorer Muslim slaves who did not read and write, Sylviane Diouf nevertheless asserts that a “large proportion of the deported Africans came from the intellectual elite.”¹⁸ She reasons that the mobility of scholars who traveled to learning centers and to royal courts to serve as advisors or clerics were at an even greater risk than illiterate Muslims at being captured in the warfare that generated slaves. There is, however, no data available on the occupational background of slaves coming into America to support this point. Whether or not the elite were more at risk than common pastoralists and agriculturists, the brief appearance of other literate Muslim slaves in the historical record does suggest that it was not uncommon for a Muslim of advanced learning and scholarly training to be enslaved in America.

Some advanced Muslim slaves were unwilling to engage in the manual labor that was required of slaves on American plantations. Ayuba Suleiman Diallo, aka Job ben Solomon, is the earliest Muslim slave to appear in the North American historical record. Son of the High Priest of Bunda, ben Solomon “assisted his father as imaum, or Sub-priest” at the age of fifteen, thirteen years before his capture.¹⁹ Because an Imam is a religious leader of the Muslim community who leads prayers, ben Solomon had extensive training in Islamic education and Arabic classics. Despite this upbringing, his master immediately put him to work in tobacco cultivation when he arrived in Maryland in 1734. Having been a religious leader in Africa who had spent his time training in the classics and who had left manual labor to his own slaves, ben Solomon was not used to manual labor. He “shewed more and more Uneasiness under this Exercise” until his

¹⁷ Sylviane A. Diouf, *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 124.

¹⁸ Diouf, 39.

¹⁹ Thomas Bluett, *Some Memoirs of the Life of Job, the Son of Solomon the High Priest of Boonda in Africa...and sent to his native Land in the Year 1734* (London: Richard Ford, 1734), 15.

master “was obliged to find easier work for him” such as tending to cattle.²⁰ But not even this appeased ben Solomon, who eventually ran away hoping that he might be able to find a master “who would use him better.”²¹ Similarly, Omar ibn Said, a Senegalese slave brought to South Carolina in 1807 refused to work on his master’s plantation. An article published in 1825 explains that when Omar ibn Said was first sold in South Carolina, his master very quickly became aware that his slave was unable to work the fields or “had not the disposition to do so.”²² ibn Said’s “disposition” was perhaps more well-suited to the commentaries and classics that he had studied for twenty-five years. When ibn Said ran away and was jailed, his master did not even bother to claim him. As ben Solomon and ibn Said, Rahahman escaped from his plantation—twice. Like ben Solomon, he was a prince with extensive education in Africa who had slaves perform labor for him there. The 1825 article in which we learn of ibn Said captured in its title the frustration of slaveholders who encountered Muslim slaves from prominent backgrounds: “Prince or priest there? Of no laboring value here.”²³ Though referring to ibn Said, this title very well could have been describing Job ben Solomon or Abdul Rahahman. All were “priests” for Americans and all three were depicted as “princes” in their African homelands, statuses that help explain their extensive literary training. The prominent backgrounds of these slaves, whether priest or prince, made them loathe to perform manual labor in North America.

If some masters complained about Muslim slaves, others accommodated those with privileged backgrounds. Because of the achievements of an elite class of scholars and rulers who were all educated, “Moorish” slaves in America came to be seen as possessing “superior intelligence” than the others.²⁴ Rather than compel them to labor in the fields, some masters offered them administrative positions instead. Omar ibn Said’s second master treated him as a

²⁰ Ibid., 19.

²¹ Ibid., 20.

²² “Prince Moro”, *The Christian Advocate* 3 (July 1825): 306.

²³ Austin, 460.

²⁴ Sir Charles Lyell, *A Second Visit to the United States of North America* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1850), 1:266.

house servant and “put him in possession of the keys of all his ... stores.”²⁵ According to another account, Omar ibn Said’s “merits are duly appreciated by his worthy master” who indulged him by not requiring too much manual labor from him.²⁶ Similarly, Yarrow Mamout, a Muslim slave in Maryland who died in 1823, was put to work as a domestic servant with uncommon privileges. He was his master’s body servant. In this position, Mamout was expected to follow his master and given the opportunity “to see firsthand how the planters conducted business and to meet the influential men of Maryland.”²⁷ He also assisted his master during meetings. Mamout and ibn Said were provided domestic positions with easy access to the master that allowed them to handle some of their masters’ affairs. The slaves’ capabilities in these instances did not go unnoticed by their masters, who found the “better use” for them that Job ben Solomon was seeking when he ran away from his master.

Apart from domestic jobs, masters who acknowledged the skills of their distinguished Muslim slaves frequently offered them higher-ranking positions as drivers. Bilali of Sapelo Island, Georgia served as the head driver and often managed a plantation of 400 to 500 slaves when his master, Spalding, was away. On neighboring St. Simon’s Island, Salih Bilali, a close friend of Bilali of Sapelo, also served as head driver for a plantation of 450 slaves. According to Salih Bilali’s master, his “industry, intelligence...soon brought him into notice, and he was successfully advanced, until he was made head driver of this plantation in 1816.”²⁸ Indeed, Couper was very impressed by his Muslim slave’s “quickness of apprehension, strong powers of combination and calculation,” each arising, perhaps, from the mathematics he learned in school in Jenne (now a city in Mali).²⁹ Couper also does not fail to mention Bilali of Sapelo at the end, noting his ability to write Arabic, something even his accomplished Salih Bilali could no longer

25 “Prince Moro,” 306.

26 John Louis Taylor to Francis Scott Key, Raleigh, NC, October 10, 1819, in Allan D. Austin, *African Muslims in Antebellum America: A Sourcebook* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1984), 455.

27 James H. Johnston, *From Slave Ship to Harvard: Yarrow Mamout and the History of an African American Family* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 60.

28 William Brown Hodgson, *Notes on Northern Africa, the Sahara, and the Soudan* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1844), 68.

29 Ibid.

do. Salih Bilali, in fact, had been kidnapped at the age of fourteen when he had just begun his advanced studies in Jenne. It was the achievements that these Muslim slaves exhibited that grabbed the attention of experienced masters like Spalding and Couper, who as a result tended to see greater potential in their Muslim slaves and appoint them as drivers.

The role of a driver was a crucial one on the plantation, reserved for an especially reliable slave. The driver fulfilled a “vital role” as an “authoritative figure and community leader among slaves.”³⁰ Even though a driver was elevated to his position by the master, an experienced master would be fully aware that only a driver who commanded respect and could motivate his peers would be effective and productive.³¹ Both Bilali of Sapelo and Salih Bilali demonstrated this capability on their respective plantations. Zephaniah Kingsley, a well-renowned plantation owner, specifically mentioned two instances in which gangs of slaves were “prevented from deserting to the enemy by drivers, or influential negroes,” and in both instances, the influential negroes were “professors of the Mahomedan religion.”³² It was 1812 and the British were waging a war against the U.S. to reclaim their colonies by force. Like the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812 provided opportunities for slaves to gain freedom by taking up arms for the British.³³ War also provided the opportunity to avenge themselves against the whites who had dominated them. It is striking, then, that only a few slaves on these plantations, if any, escaped to the British lines in 1812. Both Bilali of Sapelo and Salih Bilali commanded sufficient authority among the slaves under their command to convince them to stay and defend the plantation instead of running off to the enemy.

On plantations such as those of St. Simons and Sapelo Islands that had a significant population of Muslim slaves, the elevation of an educated Muslim to head driver made a great deal of sense. In his study of Muslim slaves, Gomez relies on Lorenzo Turner’s data on the

³⁰ Robert L. Paquette and Louis A. Ferleger, eds., *Slavery, Secession, and Southern History* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 49.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 50.

³² Zephaniah Kingsley, *A Treatise on the Patriarchal or Co-Operative System of Society*, 2nd ed. (1829), 14.

³³ Donald R. Hickey, *The War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 213.

Gullah Dialect to argue for the “presence of a sizeable Muslim community in coastal Georgia-South Carolina.”³⁴ Of the hundreds of personal names Turner gathered, about 274 demonstrated a Muslim connection.³⁵ Considering planters’ propensity to give their slaves English names, there were potentially even more Muslim slaves than those suggested by Turner’s data. Later interviews with Bilali’s descendants also reveal that Islamic practices continued on the plantation among the African-born. Couper himself described his slave driver as “a strict Mahometan” who “keeps the various fasts” and even “has a Koran” that he read.³⁶ Bilali’s owner jokingly remarked about his Muslim slaves that “no Mahometan with his seven daily ablutions, is a greater enemy to dirt than sugar” when discussing how to handle sugar processing equipment.³⁷ These masters were acutely aware of their Muslim slaves’ religious observances. For practicing Muslim slaves, “strict Mahometan” drivers would have great influence over them. Considered in this light, Bilali’s “diary” begins to make more sense. The “diary,” though not translated until the mid-twentieth century, proved to be excerpts from the Risalah, a “legal work from the Malekite school” of thought in Islamic studies.³⁸ Bilali of Sapelo had been a cleric for years in Africa before he was kidnapped as a slave. He was clearly practicing in America what he had learned in Africa. Austin posits that Bilali of Sapelo may have been instructing Salih Bilali in the Bahamas before both men were both brought over to Georgia. It is not unlikely, then, that Bilali should have acted as an instructor on the plantation for the other Muslim slaves and perhaps even used the Risalah as a text with which to teach others. Muslims would have looked up to Bilali, a scholar with years of training as an imam of sorts, to lead them. Salih Bilali’s ability to at least read the Quran would have also proved valuable in this capacity. The prevalence of Muslims and Islamic practices on American plantations probably gave the two trained Bilalis the authority they needed as drivers.

³⁴ Michael A. Gomez, *Black Crescent: The Experience and Legacy of African Muslims in the Americas* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 158.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Hodgson, *Notes*, 69.

³⁷ Austin, 277.

³⁸ Joseph H. Greenberg, “The Decipherment of the ‘Ben-Ali Diary,’” *Journal of Negro History* 25, no. 3 (1940): 375.

Influence over Muslim slaves did not guarantee a position as driver, however. The Bilalis also had to command respect among non-Muslims. Europeans and other visitors to his plantation at the time observed that Bilali of Sapelo was a “magnificent Mohammedan ‘headman’” with a family that “bore the unfamiliar stamp of their origin and once higher worldly position.”³⁹ Contemporary observers felt there was a certain air of dignity that resulted from his status as an elite back in Africa that distinguished Bilali from the other slaves. His literary attainments attested to his previous wealth and prestige. Furthermore, the role of Muslim scholars as cosmopolitan leaders who traveled to various kingdoms allowed them to develop skills in dealing with “diverse peoples and different cultures” that “proved very valuable in the plantation world” where they had to interact with slaves drawn from different regions in Africa.⁴⁰ In his African travels, Mungo Park remarked upon the presence of “Mahometans” who “acted in two capacities,” as chief magistrates and as schoolmasters.⁴¹ Muslim scholars from prominent backgrounds were known for serving as advisors to non-Muslim tribal chiefs. These chiefs valued their Muslim advisors for the supposed potency of their amulets that could bring good fortune to military campaigns. The reputation of such Muslim intellectuals accompanied West African captives to America. African slaves on an American plantation were able to conclude that Omar ibn Said was a “pray-God” to the king because of his intellectual merits.⁴² The non-Muslims around Omar ibn Said immediately associated the role of advisor with his scholarly attributes. It is not unlikely that the non-Muslims around the Bilalis made similar associations. In fact, the prevalence of Muslim names denoting amulets in Georgia suggests these slaves were familiar with and prized amulets. They would have been aware also of the admiration accorded to Muslim scholars as creators of these amulets. Muslim intellectuals like the two Bilalis, then, appeared to have commanded some

³⁹ Ella May Thornton, “Bilali--His Book,” in Allan D. Austin, *African Muslims in Antebellum America: A Sourcebook* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1984), 291.

⁴⁰ Diouf, 103.

⁴¹ Park, *Travels*, 247.

⁴² Taylor to Key, 455.

wary respect from non-Muslims, who remembered Muslim advisors back in Africa. Masters also considered influence over non-Muslims when selecting Muslim slaves as drivers.

The experiences of Bilali of Sapelo and Salih Bilali may shed light upon other Muslim slaves who rose to positions as drivers. S'Quash of North Carolina, who could also write Arabic, became a headman of his master's plantation and eventually also an overseer.⁴³ A New Orleans slave trader picked a "Mandingo" Muslim slave as the overseer of his plantation and was very pleased with him.⁴⁴ Abdul Rahahman was promoted to driver after running away two times from his plantation. Incidents like these have led some historians, like Gomez and Diouf, to conclude that planters "turned to the Muslims for drivers, overseers, and confidential servants with a frequency their numbers did not justify."⁴⁵ Similarly, Lovejoy asserts that Muslims gained positions of authority, "with privileges out of proportion to their numbers."⁴⁶ The careers of Bilali of Sapelo and Salih Bilali provide valuable insight into why planters may have preferred educated Muslims as drivers and overseers. Their education set them apart from the rest of the slave population, attracting their masters' attention. Furthermore, their scholarly training won the respect of African-born slaves, both Muslim and non-Muslim, who were used to having such scholars as leaders back home. Masters in turn would have picked up on this influence over the rest of the slaves, leading to a "process of stratification" within the slave population that suggested "Mahomedans" as inherently superior to "regular negroes."⁴⁷ In this way, a small class of literate and distinguished Muslim slaves developed, individuals who were placed as authoritative figures over Muslim and non-Muslim slaves at a rate disproportional to their actual numbers in American slave society.

II

⁴³ Austin, 24.

⁴⁴ Terry Alford, *Prince Among Slaves* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), 56.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Paul E. Lovejoy, ed., *Slavery on the Frontiers of Islam* (n.p.: Markus Wiener, 2004), 245.

⁴⁷ Gomez, *Black Crescent*, 173.

In 1828, the U.S. Secretary of State, Henry Clay, urged a Southern plantation owner to free one of his slaves and promised to pay for the freed slave's transportation to Washington D.C. The slave's name was Abdul Rahahman Ibrahim ibn Sori, a Fulani from Timbuktu born to the king of Timbo in what is now Guinea. At the age of 26, Abdul Rahahman set out to fight a group of "Hebohs" for disrupting his kingdom's coastal trade and found himself instead on a ship bound for the Americas. Rahahman was captured and taken toward the coast, away from the reach of his father, who might ransom him. He was sold to a British slave trader. Eventually, he arrived in Mississippi, where Colonel Thomas Forster purchased him and enslaved him for the next forty years, calling him "Prince." In 1807, Abdul Rahahman was selling vegetables in Natchez when he spotted a doctor who his family had sheltered in Africa. Dr. Cox had stayed for six months in Abdul Rahahman's house after missing his ship to America and was so grateful for the hospitality of Abdul Rahahman's family that—when he saw Rahahman in Natchez—he promptly sent for the governor to come see Abdul Rahahman and appeal to Colonel Forster for his release. Despite Cox's offer of "large sums," Forster refused. Abdul Rahahman remained a slave.⁴⁸

This incident made Abdul Rahahman a celebrity in Natchez. In the early 1820s, Rahahman grabbed the attention of newspaper editor Andrew Marschalk. Marschalk learned of Abdul Rahahman and asked him to write a letter in Arabic that he could send to his family in Africa. Marschalk sent the letter to Henry Clay instead. Under pressure from Henry Clay, Colonel Forster agreed to let Rahahman go. By that time, Abdul Rahahman had also gained the attention of the American Colonization Society (ACS). The ACS was founded in 1816 as a moderate solution to the problem of slavery. It aimed to end slavery by gradually emancipating slaves and sending all free black people to Africa. This solution was unique in that it gathered support from a variety of constituencies in both the American North and South. To garner public support, the

48 "Abdul Rahahman, The Unfortunate Moorish Prince," *The African Repository* 4, no.3 (May 1828): 81.

Society often conveyed vague and contradictory messages about its goals.⁴⁹ Some of these stressed its emancipatory projects while others assured Southern slaveholders that the Society did not immediately threaten slavery. In general, however, ACS manumitters viewed colonization as a necessary means by which to prevent racial revolts of freed slaves. While the ACS criticized slavery, it did not vehemently oppose the institution. Rather, the ACS, in its view, sought to mitigate slavery's harmful effects on society.⁵⁰

As Abdul Rahahman embarked on a tour of the Northeast to raise funds for his family's passage back to Africa, it was this "peculiar solution to slavery," the ACS, that played a major role in promoting his story. On his tour, Abdul Rahahman met with various dignitaries and influential members of the ACS who invited him to meetings and dinner galas to raise awareness about his cause. In the midst of his tour, Abdul Rahahman became embroiled in a heated debate over the upcoming 1828 U.S. presidential election. Southern newspapers began using Rahahman's association with freedmen organizations in the North to denounce presidential candidate John Quincy Adams in favor of Andrew Jackson. Abdul Rahahman's affiliation with these abolitionist freedmen, Southern newspapers claimed, was proof of Adams's designs to bring down slavery. Abdul Rahahman departed for Liberia in February of 1829, some months after the election. Why did a Muslim slave like Abdul Rahahman receive such favor from the American Colonization Society and become the center of a national controversy?

That the ACS took a great interest in Abdul Rahahman is evident from its involvement in his life from the time of his release from bondage. As early as February 1828, even before Abdul Rahahman arrived in Washington D.C., he gained fame as the "Unfortunate Moor," as he was called in *The African Repository*, the newspaper of the ACS. In December of 1827, a lawyer and supporter of the colonization movement, Cyrus Griffin, wrote to a member of the American

49 Eric Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 23.

50 Ibid., 39-40.

Colonization Society “in behalf of an unfortunate man, a native of Africa, who has been held in slavery” and may be of “incalculable importance to the Colony of Liberia.”⁵¹ He revealed in this letter that another letter had been sent to the Department of State “under the hope that the Government might consider him [Rahahman] a fit subject for their interposition” though he believed “nothing has been done” yet.⁵² The American Colonization Society became involved with Rahahman at about the same time as the State Department did. At the time, the State Department’s plan to bring Abdul Rahahman to Washington D.C. was not known. Since it was not clear at the time what would happen to Abdul Rahahman after gaining his freedom, Griffin reached out to the American Colonization Society in his letter to secure Abdul Rahahman’s passage back to Africa. Ralph Gurley, the secretary of the American Colonization Society and founder of *The African Repository*, later published this letter in his periodical under the title “Unfortunate Moor.” Gurley prefaced his story of the “Unfortunate Moor” with a statement that the “Society has every disposition to aid the unfortunate man, and it is hoped that he may take a passage in the next expedition.”⁵³ Shortly after learning about Abdul Rahahman, then, the ACS promised to take up his cause.

It is important to examine the program of the ACS to understand how Abdul Rahahman fit within its plans for colonization. At the inauguration of the ACS in 1816, Henry Clay, who was then Speaker of the House of Representatives, delivered a speech remarking upon the need for and merits of the society. He challenged the audience to think of a “nobler cause” than to “rid our country of a useless and pernicious, if not dangerous, portion of its population,” the freedmen, by sending them to “civilize” Africa. Twelve years after its inauguration, the Society reaffirmed its commitment to and reasoning for sending free blacks to Africa. The text explaining this commitment appeared in the same edition as did Abdul Rahahman’s story. “The free blacks in our country,” the text read, “are as a body, more vicious and degraded than any other which our

51 “The Unfortunate Moor,” *The African Repository* 3, no. 12 (February 1828): 364.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid.

population embraces.”⁵⁴ For the removal of this “vicious” population, “the objects of this Institution are unquestionably of a pure character, contemplating *no possible movement that can jeopardize the interests of slave-holders*.”⁵⁵ The ACS sought to appease its Southern supporters by reassuring them that the removal of the free blacks served white Southern interests. Many Southern slaveholders were convinced that newly emancipated freedmen would incite slave revolts.⁵⁶ The removal of freedmen to Africa, the ACS claimed, could secure the immediate interests of slavery by preventing insurrections. Many Southern slaveholders came to support the Society as a safe alternative to immediate emancipation for all slaves. In the minds of several supporters of colonization, the Society served primarily to expel threatening forces to social stability. The people helping Abdul Rahahman who supported colonization shared this view. After Rahahman began mingling with free black abolitionists, Marschalk denounced Griffin for his support of the colonization movement that had failed to send Rahahman to Africa immediately after his emancipation. In his own newspaper, the *Southern Galaxy*, Griffin defended colonization by reaffirming its commitment to peace. He claimed that “every free negro should be compelled to leave the state” while “the numerous horde of negroes that fill our woods and bayous should be reduced to subjection” through a “more energetic system of police.” This will all serve to “render this property (slaves) valuable, and the peace of the country secure.”⁵⁷ The same people who were exerting so much effort to help Abdul Rahahman were primarily interested in securing the peace of the country by removing a population they deemed threatening to social stability.

Abdul Rahahman’s potential to “disrupt society” lay in his Arabic literacy, which directly threatened the racist justifications of a slave society ordered on the presumed inferiority of African intellect. According to Sylviane Diouf, a Muslim slave’s literacy was “dangerous because

54 “Intelligence,” *The African Repository* 3, no. 1 (March 1827): 24.

55 *Ibid.*, (emphasis added).

56 Early Lee Fox, *The American Colonization Society 1817-1840* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1919), 27.

57 Austin, 213.

it represented a threat to the white's intellectual domination and a refutation of the widely held belief that Africans were inherently inferior and incapable of intellectual pursuits."⁵⁸ While that may have been true of slaves' literacy in general, Rahahman's Arabic literacy showcased the intellectual capabilities of Africans in Africa "without the aid of Europe or Christianity," thus disproving many American justifications of slavery based on African debasement.⁵⁹ Many contemporary proponents of slavery in the Atlantic shared the view that Africans were "too ignorant," while "all that is monstrous, vile, and contemptible is universally found amongst these savages."⁶⁰ In instances where these proponents acknowledged that Africans were capable of learning and becoming literate, they still asserted that "in their own land, they could never have attained" such an accomplishment.⁶¹ It was in direct response to views such as these that Dr. Madden published his *Twelve Years Residence in West Indies* in 1835. Madden concluded that "the natives of some parts of Africa are not so utterly ignorant as they are represented to be." Madden felt that "the negroes, generally, are as capable of mental improvement as their white brethren."⁶² Significantly, Madden arrived at this conclusion through exchanging letters with Muslim slaves who had exhibited proficiency in the Arabic language, men much like Abdul Rahahman. To Southerners who defended slavery on the basis that Africans were no more intelligent than animals, and needed the civilizing influence of their masters, African Muslims who came to the New World with literary achievements in their own language challenged key justifications for enslavement before the public eye.

It was in part to deal with contradictions in their racist justifications of slavery that slaveowners differentiated their literate Muslim slaves from other slaves. The Arabic literacy and Islamic background of literate Muslims assimilated them to Arabs in the minds of Southerners.

⁵⁸ Diouf, 108.

⁵⁹ Race Capet, "Created Equal: Slavery and America's Muslim Heritage," *Cross Currents* 60 no. 4 (December 2010): 559.

⁶⁰ George Wilson Bridges, *The Annals of Jamaica* (London: John Murray, 1834), 2:400.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 4 (emphasis added).

⁶² R. R. Madden, *A Twelvemonth's Residence in the West Indies, During the Transition from Slavery to Apprenticeship* (Westport, CT: Negro University Press, 1835) 2:137-138.

Reclassifying literate black African Muslim slaves as Arabs allowed southerners to “deny any Africanness to the distinguished Muslims.”⁶³ Identifying Muslim Africans as Arabs also brought those slaves closer to whites. A “whitening of the ‘elite’ slaves,” Diouf argues, was necessary to preserve the racist justifications that undergirded slavery.⁶⁴ The ACS availed itself of this idea to define Abdul Rahahman as an “unfortunate Moor,” “Moors” being understood at the time as a type of Arab. In an article in the *Southern Galaxy*, Griffin confidently asserted that “Prince is a Moor” even though his “present appearance suggests a doubt.”⁶⁵ Abdul Rahahman, he argued, appeared “materially different on his arrival in this country” his hair being “soft and very long” as opposed to the “short and curly” it was at the time that Griffin composed his article.⁶⁶ To further erase Abdul Rahahman’s black African origins, Griffin claimed that the “Moor’s” facial angle was even “equal, and perhaps greater, than most of the whites.”⁶⁷ The stratification of slave hierarchy that placed “Moors” in positions over other slaves was bolstered in part by such attempts to rewrite their origins.

Collapsing separate racial categories by identifying “Moors” with “negroes” could provoke social unrest by inspiring black movements for equal rights. Southerners worried that blacks taking advantage of the collapse of categories could rely upon the example of Rahahman’s intellectual achievements to discredit accusations of mental inferiority and fight for equal treatment. Abdul Rahahman’s attendance at a Boston dinner in August hosted by a free black association seemed to confirm this possibility. This dinner sparked anxieties in Southern newspapers over Rahahman’s role as a “negro who could read and write the Arabic language with facility.”⁶⁸ Marschalk’s reference to Rahahman as a “negro” after the latter’s attendance at this dinner marks a shift from his earlier categorization of Rahahman as a “Moor.” As a “Moor,” Rahahman had been lauded for his intellectual achievements. In showing solidarity with freed

63 Diouf, 99.

64 Diouf, 100.

65 “Prince, The Moor,” *Southern Galaxy*, June 5, 1828.

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid.

68 Editorial, *Louisiana Advertiser*, October 25, 1828.

black men, however, Rahahman became a “negro devil” whose literacy in a foreign language became unbearable. Abdul Rahahman’s story, comments Austin, was starting to sound too much to American newspaper readers like a story of a “civilized man kidnapped and misused by savages—who were white.”⁶⁹ What greater appeal could there be to those who wished to rebel than the example of an educated and dignified *black* personality (as opposed to a “Moor” with white characteristics), unjustly harmed and oppressed by the cruel whites? Statements by black speakers at the dinner that “every bondman’s soul shall be filled with a *knowledge of his right*, and be allowed to assert it in conscious rectitude” convinced Marschalk that Abdul Rahahman was supplying American freedmen with notions of equality.⁷⁰ It would not be long, warned Marschalk, before such notions “excite negroes in the southern states to rise and massacre their masters.”⁷¹ Abdul Rahahman’s identification outside his racial class with “negroes” was encouraging black freedmen’s assertion of fair treatment.

Those who castigated Abdul Rahahman in late 1828 were primarily objecting to his extended stay in America. Rahahman’s owner had agreed to emancipate his slave “for the sole and only purpose of his being transported to his native country...agreeably to the stipulation...that the said slave Prince, is not to enjoy the privileges of a free man, within the United States of America.”⁷² Yet Rahahman had remained in the U.S. for a few more months, causing Southerners like Marschalk to denounce a “violation” that “produced the Boston dinner” and which had consequently proven “most injurious to the south.”⁷³ The anxieties surrounding Abdul Rahahman aired publicly by Southern propagandists during the time of the Boston dinner reveal part of the reason the ACS was interested in him. The ACS sought to secure domestic tranquility by expelling “dangerous and insurrectionary forces.” Understanding that distinguished and educated

⁶⁹ Austin, 23.

⁷⁰ “Mr. Adams and the Emancipation of Slaves and the Violation of the Faith of the Administration,” *Statesman and Gazette*, October 16, 1828.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

Muslims would be more useful in Africa than in America, where they defied racial norms, the ACS sought to deport Rahahman to Liberia. The ACS's promotion of Rahahman in the Northeast, though, enabled him to attend the Boston dinner. Unwittingly, the ACS facilitated the sort of association between intelligent "Moors" and freed "negroes" that would prompt the latter to demand equal rights. It was in part to avoid this sort of "disruption to society" that made sending Rahahman back to Africa so appealing to both the ACS and to many white Southerners. Reading the public debate about Rahahman helps to illuminate the ways in which segments of white America navigated around issues of emancipation, race, and business and moral interests. Apart from Rahahman's (negative) potential in North American slave society, the ACS was even more motivated by the (positive) potential of such accomplished Muslim slaves in Africa.

III

Abdul Rahahman suited the designs of the American Colonization Society in more than one way. In the minds of many Southern whites, he might have represented the kind of "dangerous force" that threatened social stability. But he was also a perfect example for that organization of the usefulness and productivity of these same forces if located to Africa. In the letter that Griffin first sent to Gurley introducing him to Abdul Rahahman, Griffin ended with a juicy tidbit emphasizing Abdul Rahahman's potential usefulness in Africa. Griffin's excitement as a supporter of colonization at having discovered Abdul Rahahman is almost palpable. "I cannot but persuade myself but that you will seize with avidity an instrument that appears so completely adapted to your wants," he raved.⁷⁴ Sympathetic journals echoed Griffin's optimism by reiterating the hope that Abdul Rahahman's return to Africa "might have a salutary influence upon the exertions of the American Colonization Society in Africa."⁷⁵ The removal of freedmen and distinguished slaves like Abdul Rahahman was not only advantageous for American stability, but would serve an important purpose in Africa.

⁷⁴ "The Unfortunate Moor," 367.

⁷⁵ *The Springfield Hampden Journal*, October 8, 1828.

In shipping freedmen to Liberia, the ACS was hoping to put them to a better and more productive use in revitalizing Africa for American commercial business interests. The same year that Marschalk wrote to Henry Clay about Abdul Rahahman, Clay asserted in an address to the Society that emigrants to Africa would “carry back to their native soil the rich fruits of religion, civilization, law, and liberty.”⁷⁶ In other words, the “useless and pernicious” population of America would become, in this thinking, the beacons of light and civilization for the continent. The success of the colony would be the key to bringing prosperity to the rest of Africa, and commerce was one way to do so. “Prompted by the spirit of commercial enterprise,” the citizens of Liberia, according to ACS members, would maintain “friendly intercourse” with neighboring tribes.⁷⁷ In so doing, these citizens could build relationships with “those more remote” and “finally open the way” for American business into the interior regions of Africa.⁷⁸ Only then could proper civilization take root. Of course, Europeans had long been paving their way into the interior of Africa to enhance commerce and “civilization.” America was now following suit, and strengthening commerce in Liberia was crucial to the ACS’s plans for Africa.

There could have been no better prospect for commerce than the “Moorish prince” Abdul Rahahman. Elite merchants like Charles Tappan began socializing with the freedman, a development Boston journals did not fail to notice.⁷⁹ Charles Tappan listed himself as a contact for anyone who wanted to assist Prince in his “commendable objects,” which included enhancing trade between Liberia and Timbuktu.⁸⁰ Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, another ACS member, delivered a statement in a special meeting convened to raise money for Abdul Rahahman’s campaign. Whereas other elites like Tappan had only briefly suggested how useful Abdul Rahahman would be in opening commerce, Gallaudet’s speech delved into the specifics of the

⁷⁶ *Speech of the Honorable Henry Clay Before the American Colonization Society in the Hall of the House of Representatives, January 20, 1827* (Washington: Columbian Office, 1827), 11.

⁷⁷ “Review,” *The African Repository* 4, no. 1 (March 1828): 2.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ “The Moorish Prince,” *Manufacturer’s and Farmer’s Journal*, August 21, 1828.

⁸⁰ *New England Palladium and Commercial Advertiser*, August 12, 1828, in Allan D. Austin, *African Muslims in Antebellum America: A Sourcebook* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1984), 162.

freedman's value in Africa. *The African Repository* promptly published the talk later that month in its October edition. What made Abdul Rahahman such an asset to American commercial interests?

According to Gallaudet, it was his princely connections. Unlike previous biographies, Gallaudet's retelling of the freedman's history was unique for its focus on Abdul Rahahman's family. Gallaudet began by introducing Abdul Rahahman's grandfather as the king of Timbuktu. He then described a military campaign conducted by Abdul Rahahman's father in which the latter became governor of a city he conquered. Gallaudet also listed distant cousins who were governors of other cities. At the end of the list, Gallaudet shared as his reasoning for drawing out Rahahman's family history the need "to show that Prince's family connections were persons of power and influence in Africa."⁸¹ Even though Gallaudet clarified that humanity should be enough to prompt people to aid a man who had helped one of their own, a reference to Dr. Cox, he nonetheless urged consideration for a "higher motive: a commercial intercourse that may be opened."⁸² This commercial "intercourse" would only be possible when Abdul Rahahman went to visit his "aged father," an act so peaceful and heartwarming that "no apprehensions will be excited among his relations," Gallaudet noted.⁸³ Whereas in previous times, people in the African interior might have been wary about trading with Americans, Abdul Rahahman's return would gain the confidence of the relatives who governed those territories and encourage them to trade with Liberia. For this reason, the ACS took great pains to corroborate Abdul Rahahman's story. The ACS's publication of Gallaudet's statement was followed by extracts taken from African gazettes, like the *Sierra Leone Gazette*, that mentioned the "Alimamy" in "Teembo" and helped them conclude that Abdul Rahahman's brother was indeed in power.⁸⁴ To American business

⁸¹ "Abduhl Rahahman," *New York Journal of Commerce*, October 16, 1828, in Allan D. Austin, *African Muslims in Antebellum America: A Sourcebook* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1984), 171.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 174.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ "Abduhl Rahahman, the Unfortunate Moor," *The African Repository* 4, no. 8 (October 1828): 247.

interests, Abdul Rahahman's connections in Africa were vital for strengthening commerce between the interior and the colony.

Africa would benefit from this increase in commerce as merchants and traders developed the land's resources. Arthur Tappan, Charles' brother, issued his own statement two weeks after Galladuet's article appeared in *The African Repository*. Arthur Tappan's statement detailed the types of products Liberia could export to the U.S. through its connections with Timbuktu. According to Tappan, the gold and ivory of Timbuktu were profitable, but even more enticing were the "productions of the soil" that were "probably of greater value."⁸⁵ These included coffee and indigo. Indigo was becoming a favorite agricultural staple of the ACS, so much so that *The African Repository* even published extracts from the *Sierra Leone Gazette* emphasizing the possibility of indigo cultivation. This was just two pages before Gallaudet's statement on Abdul Rahahman's commercial possibilities.⁸⁶ Arthur Tappan and his brother, in fact, specialized in silk importation. Gallaudet and like-minded colonization supporters believed it was up to the colony to push for the development of these valuable resources since the "natives" did not yet see the worth in cultivating such products.⁸⁷ They reasoned that exports would allow Africa to prosper by tapping into its underdeveloped resources.

The U.S. too would commercially benefit by "disposing of our own manufactures and products in exchange" for African products.⁸⁸ In comparison to Great Britain, the colonial power in Sierra Leone, the U.S. would have "much greater advantages" for developing this trade since they had Abdul Rahahman to gain the confidence of people in the interior.⁸⁹ Furthermore, as *The African Repository* had been stressing since the beginning of that year, the activity "which directly administers" to the growth of the colony was its trade and commerce, and "not, as I

⁸⁵ "Abduhl Rahahman," *Freedom's Journal*, October 31, 1828.

⁸⁶ "African Teak and Indigo," *The African Repository* 4, no. 8 (October 1828): 239.

⁸⁷ "Abduhl Rahahman," *Freedom's Journal*, October 31, 1828.

⁸⁸ Abduhl Rahahman," *New York Journal of Commerce*, October 16, 1828, in Allan D. Austin, *African Muslims in Antebellum America: A Sourcebook* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1984), 171.

⁸⁹ "Abduhl Rahahman," *Freedom's Journal*, October 31, 1828.

would gladly say, its agriculture.”⁹⁰ Trade is what sustained the colony by attracting settlers from America. Furthermore, as long as the potential for more trade existed, settlers would continue to neglect agriculture. But colonial officials viewed agriculture as the more sustainable source of stability. It became necessary, therefore, for the colony to exhaust all possible avenues of trade in order to pave the way for agricultural development. Abdul Rahahman’s potential to open up trade routes through his connections, it was thought, made him an indispensable asset to the ACS in its ambitious designs to develop Africa, sustain its colony, and support the burgeoning U.S. manufacturing industry.

Abdul Rahahman was not the first distinguished Muslim slave to attract the attention of American business interests. Both contemporary and previous experiences of European empires in Africa served as a reference point for the ACS in the formulation of its commercial plans. While the ACS followed the progress of British Sierra Leone closely, it also benefited from the example of Job ben Solomon as an instance in which a Muslim slave was sent back to Africa. Like Rahahman, ben Solomon represented appealing prospects for trade through his Muslim networks. In the mid-eighteenth century, Job ben Solomon garnered exceptional favor from British colonial elites. Several worked hard to send ben Solomon back to Africa. Exasperated with his bondage, ben Solomon composed a treatise in Arabic requesting to be returned to Africa in the hope that his father would redeem him. He gave the document to Vachell Denton, who forwarded it to Captain Hunt, a London merchant. Through Hunt, ben Solomon gained access to the Royal African Company, and more importantly, to its Deputy Governor, James Oglethorpe. Oglethorpe was so intrigued by the Arabic letter that he immediately purchased ben Solomon from his master and paid for his voyage to England. Once in England, ben Solomon “had the Honor to be sent for by most of the Gentry of that Place, who were mightily pleased with his Company.”⁹¹ This gentry included the Earl of Pembroke, the Duke of Montagu, Duke of

⁹⁰ “Latest from Liberia,” *The African Repository* 4, no. 1 (March 1828): 19.

⁹¹ Bluett, 28.

Cumberland, and the Queen herself, all of whom gave him “many valuable presents.”⁹² Ben Solomon also made the acquaintance of influential merchants like Samuel Holden and Sir Hans Sloane through his great friend Thomas Bluett, who later composed a biography of ben Solomon. While there were philanthropic and academic reasons for these men to patronize ben Solomon, they also found him useful in promoting their business interests. When the company purchased Job ben Solomon on behalf of Oglethorpe, it did so in consideration of the fact that the “Said Negro understands and writes Arabick.”⁹³ Thus, he “may be of service to the Company on giving him his freedom and sending him to Gambia.”⁹⁴ The Company had already invested in the possibility that ben Solomon might be a valuable economic asset when Bluett took him to Cheshunt to introduce him to his friends there. At the time, Cheshunt was the favored neighborhood of wealthy London merchants who desired a country home near the city.⁹⁵ Small surprise, then, that they found Job ben Solomon’s company so pleasant.

For its part, the Royal African Company was concerned with diverting African trade away from the French and toward the English, especially the trade in gum arabic. Bluett asserted in his ending lecture on the divine workings of Providence in his biography that his encounter with ben Solomon was beneficial because of the “assurances we had from Job” that he would “use his best Endeavors to promote the *English* trade before any other.”⁹⁶ The Royal African Company certainly pushed for this development in the letter it sent to the Chief Merchants at the Gambia. In it, the Royal African Company asked the merchants to take care of ben Solomon to the best of their ability, believing that he would reciprocate the Company’s kindness by “opening and settling a trade and Correspondence between those nations (of the interior) and our highest Factorys.”⁹⁷ When he traveled with ben Solomon into the interior of Africa, Francis Moore, a

⁹² Edward Cave, *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, June 1750, 272.

⁹³ Douglas Grant, *The Fortunate Slave: An Illustration of African Slavery in the Early Eighteenth Century* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 89.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁹⁶ Bluett, 59-60.

⁹⁷ Grant, 159.

Company factor, was on the lookout for new trade goods and routes that the English could exploit. What he found was gum arabic. When two African merchants brought him a sample of white gum, Moore determined that gum would be of “great service” not only to the Royal African Company, but “to the Nation itself.”⁹⁸ England, he wrote, imported a lot of gum, “almost all of it bought of the French.”⁹⁹ The gum trade was increasing rapidly in the eighteenth century, employed in the burgeoning silk and printed textiles industries in England and France. Unfortunately for England, the French enclave of St. Louis in Senegal dominated that trade in Africa.¹⁰⁰ Gaining direct access to the gum and thereby circumventing the French monopoly would be a significant advantage to English trade.

Job ben Solomon was just the man needed to make this happen. Moore’s hopes about expanding the gum trade rested on the fact that the gum forest bordered “Job’s Country.” In a letter to the Royal African Company, ben Solomon claimed that he would endeavor to “do good for the English” until his last breath by making “so good of an understanding” between his country and the company that the “English nation should reap the benefit of the gum trade.”¹⁰¹ True to the claimed promise, ben Solomon did exert his utmost to convince tribal leaders to trade with the English. Once he arrived at Bundu, his hometown, he attended a meeting between regional leaders. There, he regaled the leaders with stories about his trials and his good treatment at the hands of the English. At the end of the meeting, ben Solomon brought news to the Company of “all the Countrys being well pleased with the Company.”¹⁰² Listening to ben Solomon and his account of the English was very important to the assembled leaders. They agreed to English trade based upon his words. According to the Royal African Company’s narrative, Job ben Solomon was proving to be as successful as it had hoped in promoting trade.

⁹⁸ Francis Moore, *Travels into the Inland Parts of Africa* 2nd ed. (London: D. Henry and R. Cave, 1738), 155.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ghislaine Lydon, *On Trans-Saharan Trails: Islamic Law, Trade Networks, and Cross-Cultural Exchange in Nineteenth-Century Western Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 94.

¹⁰¹ Moore, 172.

¹⁰² Grant, 173.

Ben Solomon's influence was not limited to his powerful relatives. On the way to Bundu, he engaged people in conversation, speaking well of the English and developing a "Veneration for those who traded amongst them [the English]." ¹⁰³ In a letter to the company, ben Solomon wrote that "all the Musulmen of my acquaintance" are praying for the company. ¹⁰⁴ When the Company purchased ben Solomon on behalf of Oglethorpe, it described him as a "negro" who "understands and writes Arabick." The description did not focus on his princely connections. The basis upon which the Company first viewed ben Solomon as an asset, then, was in direct relation to his knowledge of Arabic. Ben Solomon's engagement with "all the Musulmen" he met on his way to Bundu, in which he spread tales about England's power and generosity, was possible because of his knowledge of Arabic. Not only was Job ben Solomon a liaison with West African leaders, but he was also proving to be an effective liaison with the people of the African interior, warming them up to trade with the English.

The stories of Job ben Solomon and Abdul Rahahman demonstrate how their status as African Muslim elites was considered by Euro-American businessmen as a potentially valuable asset in Africa. As elites from prominent African Muslim kingdoms, they could potentially expand commercial possibilities through their influence over both Muslim and non-Muslim Africans. Some African Muslims had already proven their influence as drivers over slaves on American plantations. Closer to their families and previous personal connections in Africa, it was felt, these elite slaves could prove to be even more beneficial to American business interests.

Increasing Euro-American access to the interior of Africa through the help of such elites might not only serve commercial purposes. It would also help the ACS Christianize all of Africa from its colonial base of Liberia. In an 1828 report, the Society expressed a "deep concern" for the "spiritual as well as intellectual illumination of the millions of Africa." ¹⁰⁵ The American

¹⁰³ Moore, 153.

¹⁰⁴ Austin, 101.

¹⁰⁵ Editorial, *Southern Galaxy* (June 26, 1828), in Allan D. Austin, *African Muslims in Antebellum America: A Sourcebook* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1984), 193.

colony of Liberia and its citizens, it was thought, would serve as the bearers of the Gospel to “dark” and “ignorant” Africans. A Christian preacher as well as merchant, Gallaudet was especially invested in this goal. He pressed Abdul Rahahman to read the Bible carefully and embrace the “true religion” after sending him an Arabic copy of another Christian book.¹⁰⁶ It is significant that Gallaudet singled out Abdul Rahahman as the “means” chosen specifically by “Providence” (rather than business interests) to open a “wide and effectual door for the diffusion of that Gospel.”¹⁰⁷ In Gallaudet’s understanding, Abdul Rahahman’s family contacts would be helpful in opening up a friendly connection between Liberia and the interior through which to advance missionary work from the colony. More importantly, though, the African “Prince” would serve as an instrument to spread Christianity through proficiency in Arabic. Gallaudet could see “God’s finger” pointing to “great results” from Rahahman after establishing that he (Rahahman) had not forgotten Arabic during his time as an American slave but continued to read and write it fluently.¹⁰⁸ The ACS followed up Gallaudet’s statement in its journal with a quote from Mungo Park, who theorized that distributing a short introduction to Christianity in Arabic would have wondrous effects in Africa.¹⁰⁹ Abdul Rahahman would seem to be the best means by which to spread and teach this “introduction.”

The ACS would in fact soon become interested in the Arabic language. Before Abdul Rahahman’s introduction and subsequent fame through stories in *The African Repository*, the journal did not contain any special references to the language. After having become acquainted with the literate Muslim slave, however, the ACS markedly increased its journal publications on the uses of Arabic in Africa. Just a couple months after Abdul Rahahman left for Liberia, *The African Repository* published a letter from one Captain Thompson, who had been governor of

¹⁰⁶ Thomas H. Gallaudet to Abduhl Rahahman, Hartford, May 15, 1828, in Edward Miner Gallaudet, *Life of Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet: Founder of Deaf-Mute Instruction in America* (New York: Holt, 1888), 205.

¹⁰⁷ Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, “A Statement with Regard to the Moorish Prince, Abduhl Rahahman,” October 15, 1828, in Allan D. Austin, *African Muslims in Antebellum America: A Sourcebook* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1984), 185.

¹⁰⁸ “Abduhl Rahahman, the Unfortunate Moor,” 246.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 250.

Sierra Leone for twenty years. Wary of being considered “anti-national,” Thompson nevertheless offered to help the American colonization movement using what he learned from his extensive experience in the British effort. The guidance he offered was that Arabic was used in the interior of Africa “to an extent which has not been suspected.”¹¹⁰ He even suggested that Arabic could serve as a “powerful engine of communication.”¹¹¹ The Society was so impressed by this letter that it began its next edition in June with an article by Thompson titled “The Study of the Arabic Language.” In a preface to the article, Ralph Gurley, the secretary of *The African Repository*, insisted that the “study of this language should be neglected by none” who would embark upon missionary efforts in Africa.¹¹² Thompson’s article verified that Arabic was spoken by the tribes and cities immediately surrounding Liberia. He warned, however, that learning Arabic was “not a short and easy work” but required a man of “industrious habits...who will not spare pains.”¹¹³ Interestingly enough, the article was not limited to the semantics and orthography of Arabic, but elaborated upon the conduct of the Arabic student as well. It was not enough for the student to dress and eat as Muslims do, Thompson wrote. If a student were to adopt the “profession to dispute with the Mahomedans,” Thompson argued he should first avail himself of a copy of the Quran so that no one should ever find him “in error on the subject of its contents.”¹¹⁴ In short, the perfect missionary to West Africa would be a man with a deep knowledge and understanding of Arabic, both as it is spoken and written, and with an intellectual familiarity with the content and teachings of the Quran. What better prospect than a former Muslim slave like Abdul Rahahman, trained as a scholar in the doctrines of Islam from an early age! The ACS valued such slaves for their supposed influence over the Muslim and non-Muslim lands in matters of commerce. In matters of Christianization as well, the ACS suspected such slaves could prove to be very influential over the rest of the African population.

¹¹⁰ “Captain Thompson’s Letter,” *The African Repository* 5, no. 3 (May 1829): 86-87.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹¹² “Study of the Arabic Language,” *The African Repository* 5, no. 4 (June 1829): 97.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 104.

The ACS now embarked on a quest for Arabic-speaking instructors. In November of 1831, the Society elaborated in its journal upon two resolutions it had recently adopted. One of these was that the Colonial Agent of Liberia be authorized to employ a “native teacher” to instruct young men in the Colony “in the Arabic and other languages of the interior.”¹¹⁵ The year 1831 was also when the ACS requested another Muslim slave of its acquaintance, Omar ibn Said, to write his autobiography in Arabic. (The Society was not able to procure a translation of the autobiography until about a decade later.) The timing of this request nevertheless sheds light upon the ACS’s motives in requesting an autobiography from “Prince Moro.” The Society knew that Omar ibn Said was an Islamic scholar. Gurley had published an article on Omar ibn Said in the very first volume of his *Repository*, commenting that he had heard of “several instances of learned Mahomedans among the slaves.”¹¹⁶ In reaching out to Omar ibn Said in 1831, Gurley perhaps had hoped to shore up support for the idea of finding native Arabic speakers or scholars to teach Christianity in the Arabic-speaking interior. Gurley probably expected ibn Said to elaborate on his own education. After all, Abdul Rahahman had done so before, and so had the earlier account of Omar in 1825. Even though Gurley was unable to read an Arabic autobiography at the time that he requested it, ibn Said did in fact expand upon his educational background, listing the names of his teachers and claiming that he had studied for twenty-six years.¹¹⁷ Utilizing someone who studied Arabic for so long in the colony could immediately fulfill Liberia’s need to have Arabic-speaking missionaries while providing the young men of the colony with an instructor for future uses.

Since ibn Said did not wish to go back to Africa, it was thought that another “learned Mahomedan among the slaves” could be prevailed upon to fulfill the ACS need for instructors. For the next few years, *The African Repository* continued calling for more native Arabic teachers.

¹¹⁵ “Resolutions of the Board,” *The African Repository* 7, no. 9 (November 1831): 284.

¹¹⁶ “Prince Moro,” *The African Repository* 1 (1826): 152.

¹¹⁷ “Autobiography of Omar ibn Said, Slave in North Carolina, 1831,” *American Historical Review* 30 no. 4 (July 1925): 792.

A report from Monrovia in 1833 requested the Society to send more missionaries, especially elderly men who were familiar with general Christian theology and had studied Arabic for a while.¹¹⁸ Another report in 1834 from Monrovia stressed “how much these people (Mahomedan natives and priests) want instruction by one who can speak Arabic.”¹¹⁹ When Lamén Kebe, trained as a Muslim scholar and hailing from an illustrious lineage of renowned scholars, appeared in 1835 to seek the Society’s help, he fulfilled a growing need. Kebe appeared for the first time as “Old Paul” in the midst of a debate over the adoption of a new ACS resolution. This resolution would establish an additional colony in Africa through a recently formed collaboration between the New York and Philadelphia auxiliary colonization societies. As historian Allan Austin puts it, “Paul’s” introduction was “part of a carefully organized defense” of this new joint effort that was acting independently of the “near-bankrupt parent American Colonization Society.”¹²⁰ It is telling that as the ACS was faltering, the New York and Pennsylvania branches put Kebe forward to inspire support for an initiative seeking to take up the parent society’s mantle. Reverend Brekenridge, who introduced Kebe, defended the creation of a new colony by comparing it to the colonization of America. He suggested that Africa would benefit from multiple colonies that would be like “gems scattered across the coast...diffusing their brilliant light.”¹²¹ Kebe would play a big part in the diffusion of this new “gem’s” brilliant light. Brekenridge introduced Kebe as an “old man” who could write in Arabic and “knew the Bible in his own language.”¹²² Kebe, in fact, hailed from the prestigious Kaba family of the Jahanke, a “famous clan of pragmatic, dedicated teacher-priests in Africa.”¹²³ He boasted strong credentials for filling a vacant position for Arabic instructors. No wonder that when the ACS tried to wrangle money for an expedition to send Kebe and ninety-nine other freedmen to Africa, the ACS presented Kebe, not someone else, to the audience. A colored man, Kebe spoke, read, and wrote

¹¹⁸ “Intelligence,” *The African Repository* 9, no. 8 (October 1833): 252.

¹¹⁹ “From Liberia,” *The African Repository* 10, no. 4 (June 1834): 123.

¹²⁰ Austin, 409-410.

¹²¹ “Colonization Meeting,” *The African Repository* 11, no. 1 (January 1835): 18.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ Austin, 412-413.

the Arabic language “very perfectly,” and “intended to act as a missionary to his race.”¹²⁴ Learned Muslim slaves like Kebe became a critical part of the ACS’s mission to Christianize the Arabic-speaking parts of Africa.

In reaching out to the Arabic-speaking lands through trained scholars who were American freedmen, the ACS had an even grander plan in mind: the Christianization of the rest of Africa. Muslim slaves were seen as “natural intermediaries with the Muslims and pagans” of West Africa.¹²⁵ In 1832, just one year after requesting Omar ibn Said’s autobiography, the Society shared a recent development on the part of the British and Foreign Bible Society: it had just received “one of the most interesting applications probably ever made.”¹²⁶ The application in question was for fifty Arabic New Testaments to be distributed among the African kings and chiefs of the Congo. Explorer Richard Lander had informed the applicant that the chiefs who did not read and write Arabic had “Arabic secretaries to do it for them,” through whom a “wide field is opened” for the word of God to spread.¹²⁷ Quite a few non-Muslim peoples close to the Western Coast of Africa and in Central Africa were at this time ruled by “half-Islamicized” chiefs who employed Muslim advisers to pray and make charms for their success. These chiefs would often credit the success of their military campaigns to the special amulets their advisers created. This reputation increased the demand for such Muslim advisers in the African interior.¹²⁸ The British Bible Society hoped that in reaching out to “Arab secretaries” by converting them through distribution of Arabic Bibles that the chiefs would soon follow. The ACS soon began to entertain the same thoughts..

In 1837, intelligence reports from Monrovia on missionary efforts there repeated the familiar call for Arabic instructors. This particular call drew attention to the employment among

¹²⁴ “Colonization Meeting in New York,” *The African Repository* 11, no. 7 (July 1835): 205.

¹²⁵ Hishaam D. Aidi and Manning Marble, *Black Routes to Islam*, Critical Black Studies (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 10.

¹²⁶ “Intelligence,” *The African Repository* 8, no. 10 (December 1832): 314.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ Nehemia Levtzion, *Muslims and Chiefs in West Africa: A Study of Islam in the Middle Volta Basin in the Pre-Colonial Period* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 54-56, 90-91.

certain non-Muslim Africans of “Mandingo priests” that the informant blamed for the “stupid...Greegree system.”¹²⁹ Grisgris (greegree) were the amulets Muslim priests were often valued for making. When the Christian missionary tried to convince people that the “Book,” or Bible, proved that grisgris were ineffective, Africans responded that the Mandingo man also had a book and taught people how to keep the “greegree.” The missionary concluded that it would only make sense for the learned Muslim priests to whom West Africans “look up with so much reverence” should “themselves be taught” correct religious principles first.¹³⁰ For this reason, he requested to be sent a missionary already acquainted with the Arabic language, or else someone willing to learn it. The ACS turned to its domestic Muslim scholar population to showcase the potential leverage of such figures in Africa.

That same edition of *The African Repository* featured a reprise of Omar ibn Said’s story. Interestingly enough, this retelling appeared in a section that sought to gauge how much support there was for colonization in the Southern states. It was essential to point out that ibn Said too was “much interested in the plans and progress of the American Colonization Society.”¹³¹ As mentioned earlier in the first section, some other African slaves had recognized ibn Said as a “pray-God to the king” who “offered up prayers for the king of his nation.”¹³² While it is unclear whether Omar ibn Said was an adviser to a Muslim or non-Muslim king, his story was still important for the purposes of the ACS. It served as proof of the possibility and efficacy of converting Muslim advisers and learned men to Christianity. In endorsing the Society’s plans, it was as though Omar ibn Said was reaffirming the value of and likelihood of success for such a plan to target learned Muslim men in Africa. Gurley ended ibn Said’s story with excerpts from letters ibn Said had sent to Kebe a couple years before the latter departed for Liberia. In these letters, ibn Said raved about his good fortune in converting to Christianity and urged Kebe to help

¹²⁹ “Missionary Intelligence,” *The African Repository* 13, no. 7 (July 1837): 219.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 219-220.

¹³¹ “Secretary’s Report,” *The African Repository* 13, no. 7 (July 1837): 203.

¹³² “Prince Moro,” 153.

others of his race convert in Africa. For the ACS, then, there was already proof at home that Muslim advisers who converted to Christianity could influence others of their kind. In like manner, the ACS felt that most of Africa could soon become Christian under the leadership of freed American Muslim slaves in Muslim and non-Muslim lands. In both the commercial and Christian goals of the ACS, the supposed authority of elite African Muslims over other Africans figured prominently.

Conclusion

The role of distinguished Muslim slaves in ACS plans for its African colonies mirrored the position of such slaves in slaveholders' plans for their plantations. Supporters of the ACS romanticized elite Muslim slaves, like Abdul Rahahman, Omar ibn Said, and Lamen Kebe, as "patriarchs" paving the way for civilization in Africa. The ACS speculated that the connections of such slaves to prominent Muslim families in Africa would facilitate the development of lucrative and mutually-beneficial trade networks between American colonies on the African coast and the interior regions of Africa. In its Christianizing mission, too, the ACS looked to the population of elite Muslim slaves as ideal missionaries in Africa. The high regard for scholars in Africa, the ACS surmised, would enable Muslim slaves with scholarly training to reach out to and Christianize Arabic-speaking regions and non-Muslim communities guided by Muslim advisors. In the plantation, as well, distinguished Muslim slaves rose to positions of authority over other slaves at a disproportional rate to their population size. Their scholarly achievements afforded them influence over other Muslim slaves who looked up to them as leaders and non-Muslim African slaves who associated them with "pray-Gods" in Africa. Masters' recognition of the achievements of these elite Muslim slaves helped create the category of the "Moor" that was supposedly superior to the "negro." The uproar caused over Abdul Rahahman's solidarity with freed blackmen in Boston, in defiance of the established racial categories, demonstrated the anxiety slaveholders felt over the presence of a literate "negro who could read and write the Arabic language." The ACS, aiming to relieve American society of disruptive forces, saw greater

potential for such slaves in Africa, where they could continue to play the role of intermediaries. The presence of elite Muslim slaves in ACS's plans should not be overstated, though. After all, of the hundreds of Africans and Afro-Americans that the ACS sent out to Africa, there were only three Muslim slaves about whom there is any information. Nevertheless, these three were notable for the effort that the ACS expended in highlighting their stories above all others. Even though one hundred and six other emigrants sailed with him, it was Abdul Rahahman who appeared in every edition of *The African Repository* in the year 1828 until his return to Africa. *The African Repository* featured ibn Said's story several times to endorse the ACS's colonization scheme and build support for its efforts to recruit Arabic-speaking instructors. Out of the ninety-nine applicants waiting for a ship to Liberia, the ACS promoted Kebe's story at a crucial point to regenerate support for its movement. The stories of these slaves, as educated scholars and prominent rulers, clearly mattered to the ACS, despite their low numbers in ACS-sponsored emigration and the overall slave society in North America.

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